

Remarking on the Scar

Brett Foster

At the third follow-up appointment with the surgeon, he peeled away waning Steri-Strips from the two-inch incision. “That looks good,” he said, “although when there’s an issue deep in the abdomen it’s hard to know how it will go.

In a few weeks they will start treating those nodules found on your pelvic wall and affected lymph nodes so embedded that they remained inaccessible even when I was operating. We like to call it the God Box, that area. It’s finally a mystery, though we always do the best we can.”

He stood back and appraised his work and smiled. A month ago he removed the tumor through there, with help of a plastic sleeve inserted to keep the pieces intact as they were extracted. He did this through five point-like openings surrounding the scar like an Armada formation, the laparoscopic method requiring a Quincunx, and he took as well

so much colon that when he showed me in post-op roughly the length by holding his hands part, it all briefly seemed

like a bright boy's embellished fishing story.
Still drugged, I heard myself say, "Dude,
that's like a scarf of colon." It felt good
to surprise him, make him laugh and say
that's about right. And it also felt good
when the surgeon, after saying I could
use Cocoa Butter to lessen the darkness
of the scar, to make it more cosmetic
or presentable, he also said, "Honestly,
you don't really strike me as someone
who would care that much about such
a thing," and, in this season of severity,
I'd like to think that's also about right.

And so I am the carrier of this scar,
dark but surprisingly thin and two inches
in length. It curves ever so slightly
like a rueful smile, the kind that signals
acceptance of whatever cataclysm
is upon you or is upcoming, rumor
or prognosis, median expectancy or
whatever. I wear at my waist the smile
of one who, in the best of assessments,
is blessed with a dry sense of humor.

Brett Foster is the author of two poetry collections, *The Garbage Eater* (Triquarterly Books/Northwestern University Press, 2011) and *Fall Run Road*, which was awarded Finishing Line Press's Open Chapbook Prize. A new collection, *Extravagant Rescues*, is forthcoming. His writing has appeared in *Boston Review*, *Hudson Review*, *IMAGE*, *Kenyon Review*, *Pleiades*, *Poetry Daily*, *Raritan*, *Shenandoah*, *Southwest Review*, and *Yale Review*. He teaches creative writing and Renaissance literature at Wheaton College.